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**Project Management: Best Practices for IT Professionals**

By Richard Murch

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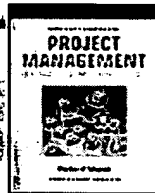
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Project Management: Best Practices for IT Professionals  
By Richard Murch

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## Chapter 16. Knowledge Management

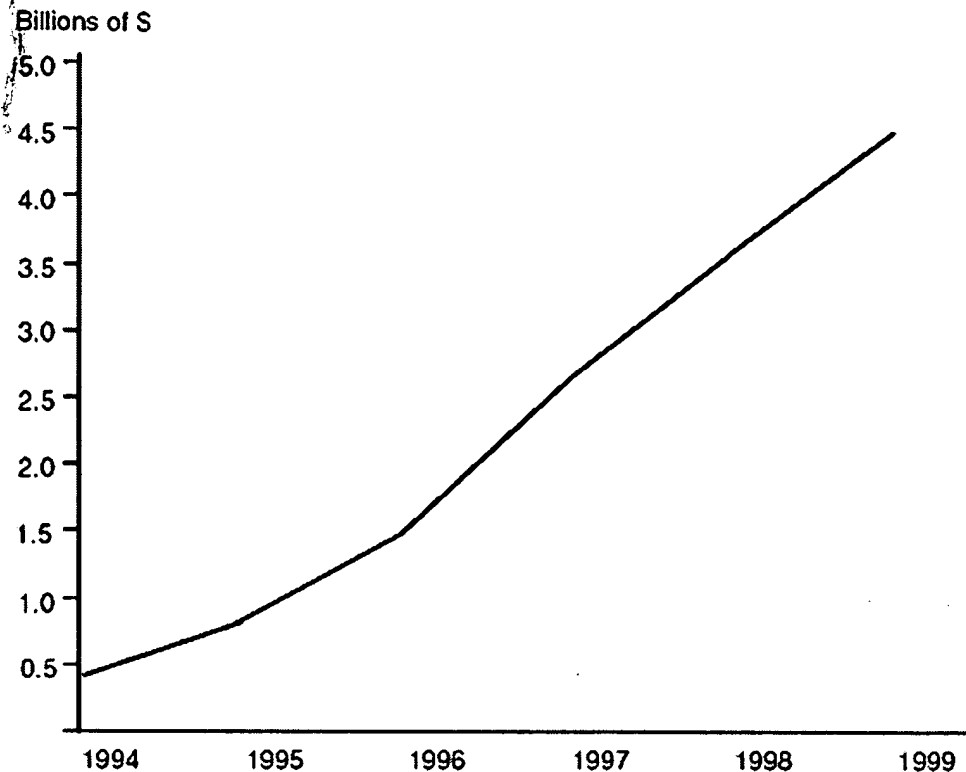
## Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) is a relatively new set of technologies that displays all the signs of a technology that will set a mega-trend for those corporations that embrace it. At the present time, KM is little understood but much talked about; there are many definitions, and there is a considerable amount of media hype around the subject. KM has been practiced intensively successfully, and very profitably by large consulting firms such as Andersen Consulting and others, together with the larger Fortune 500 companies. Scientific and technical industries (e.g., pharmaceuticals) and large computer vendors (e.g., IBM) are beginning to follow suit as the market for sales expands. KM is a key component and an enabler of the "Knowledge Economy" that has gained much media interest and has been referred to by politicians, gurus, technology forecasters, and others over the past few years. It is the subject of a burgeoning worldwide consulting business that the Gartner Group estimates will grow to \$4.5 billion in 2000 as consulting companies transfer their expertise to clients.

These figures represent by far a very conservative estimate and are almost certain to be revised upward substantially as research organizations garner more accurate statistics. Figure 16-1 illustrates the astounding growth of KM software sales.

**Figure 16-1. Sales of KM Software (1994–1999) (Source: Dataquest)**

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KM is championed by numerous but, at present, mainly small technology vendors having products that claim to provide a wide range of benefits, both quantitative and qualitative. As the market grows and expands, this market will attract larger vendors, such as IBM and others, who will roll out products and services. This is beginning to happen at the writing of this book. Like previous efforts at management and technology-enabled transformation, such as total quality management (TQM) and business process reengineering (BPR), corporations that do not fully understand the real depth of cultural commitment and change required for success overestimate KM as a path to competitive advantage and higher profits. KM differs from BPR, TQM, and other trends in that it depends on exploiting technology infrastructure by the use of products such as a knowledge warehouse (KW)—a corporate repository of all knowledge, using intranets, middleware, software agents, and other products and utilities.

KM is also an emerging set of processes, organizational structures, applications, and technologies that aims to leverage the abilities of the individual employees, project teams, and business units to *act* quickly and effectively. KM achieves this end by providing ready access to the corporation's entire store of knowledge in a repository or KW, including much of what is known but not documented. KM requires an integrated approach to identifying, managing, and—most importantly—*sharing* the enterprise's information assets, including software, databases, documents, policies, and procedures (i.e., "explicit" knowledge), as well as undocumented expertise resident in individual workers (i.e., "tacit" knowledge).

KM differs from traditional software or information engineering approaches to *data sharing* in many ways, including an emphasis on *individual behavior* as opposed to *data standardization* as the primary means for achieving information sharing and leverage. This emphasis has important implications for the technologies used to support KM. The technologies, including groupware and information retrieval (IR), are collaborative; they complement (and are complemented by) earlier approaches to data sharing, including data warehousing and data mining. Whereas the latter approaches focus on providing access to highly structured (usually transaction-derived) data, KM provides access to large-grained, relatively *unstructured information* and the people who create it.

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